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REVIEW OF CURRENT COMMUNIST
ATTITUDES TOWARD GENERAL WAR

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Submitted by the

DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

The following organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate: The Central Intelligence Agency and the Intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and The Joint Staff.

Concurred in by the

INTELLIGENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

on 15 February 1955. Concurring were the Special Assistant, Intelligence, Department of State; the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, Department of the Army; the Director of Naval Intelligence; the Director of Intelligence, USAF; and the Deputy Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff. See, however, footnotes to paragraphs 3, 4, and 8. The Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the IAC and the Assistant to the Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, abstained, the subject being outside of their jurisdiction.

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REVIEW OF CURRENT COMMUNIST ATTITUDES TOWARD GENERAL WAR

THE PROBLEM

To examine, in the light of recent developments, Soviet and Chinese Communist willingness to assume risks of war, through 1955.

SCOPE

Previous estimates (most recently NIE 11-4-54, "Soviet Capabilities and Probable Courses of Action through Mid-1959") have dealt with this problem on a long-term basis. The present estimate is confined to a short-term, and is written primarily with reference to the situation respecting Formosa and the offshore islands.

ESTIMATE

CHINESE COMMUNIST ATTITUDES

1. Chinese Communist propaganda and diplomatic representations demonstrate that the regime is strongly committed to the "liberation" of Formosa, the Pescadores, and the offshore islands. The Chinese Communist leaders give every indication of holding to this position. Moreover, Peiping has long regarded the continued presence in the Formosa Strait and on Formosa itself of a Nationalist China supported militarily by the US as at least a long-range threat to its security.

2. We believe that the Chinese Communists will refrain from courses of action which they estimate will involve them in full-scale warfare with the United States.

3. However, we believe that the Chinese Communist attitude with respect to war is bold, sometimes boisterous, sometimes sophisticated, and that the Chinese Communists are

therefore likely to test the upper limits of US tolerance with a variety of substantial military actions. Moreover, in the light of Chinese Communist activities in recent months and their reactions to the recent US policy pronouncements on the defense of Formosa and the Pescadores, we are not confident that the Chinese Communists clearly understand which, if any,¹ of the offshore islands the US would defend with its own forces, the circumstances under which the US would defend them, or the extent to which the defense would be carried. We believe, therefore, that the Chinese Communists may miscalculate the degree of risk which military actions on their part in this area would entail.

4. In any event, we believe that the Chinese Communists will probably take military action against the offshore islands of sufficient scale

¹ The Deputy Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff, would delete the words "if any."

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to test US determination to halt their advance at some point. They might even² attempt to take Quemoy, Matsu, or Nanchi regardless of whether they estimated that the US would participate in the defense of these islands. They may not be convinced, in the light of the restraint exercised by US policy in Korea and Indochina, that the US would in fact react to attacks on the offshore islands by attacks on the mainland. Or, they may believe that the scale of any US reaction, even if it involved some attacks against the mainland, could be controlled by them, perhaps by diplomatic action at a critical juncture, in which they would count heavily on the restraining influence of US allies on US policy. Finally, they may believe that the US would not be willing to react to their actions in ways which could lead by stages to full-scale war against them, and perhaps eventually to war involving the USSR. If the Communist judgments did in fact prove to be mistaken, a series of actions and counteractions might be set in train which could bring about unlimited hostilities between Communist China and the US.

SOVIET ATTITUDES

5. We believe that the Soviet leaders view general war as a hazardous gamble which could threaten the survival of their system. Accordingly, we believe that they will not deliberately initiate general war, and will try to avoid courses of action which in their judgment would clearly involve substantial risk of general war. We believe that the recent changes in Soviet leadership do not indicate any increased disposition on the part of the regime to risk such a war.

6. The Kremlin would not be deterred by the risk of general war from taking counteraction against any Western action which it regarded as an imminent threat to its security. However, we see no evidence that the Kremlin estimates any recent action by the Western Powers, including progress so far made toward German rearmament³, as constituting such an imminent threat.

²The Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, Department of the Army, believes that the words "might even" should read "probably will."

7. The new Soviet leadership has expressed "full approval and support" for Chinese Communist "policy" with respect to Formosa and the offshore islands, but has left uncertain the extent to which the USSR would support a Chinese Communist effort to take Formosa and the offshore islands by military action. We believe that Moscow might see certain advantages in clashes between Chinese Communist and US forces, at least as long as it believed that the clashes would be limited and localized. Both Soviet and Chinese Communist leaders probably estimate that strictly local conflict between the Chinese Communists and the US, with the accompanying increase of international tensions, would serve their interests. They may estimate, for example, that the US in these circumstances would not have the support of its allies or of world opinion in a defense of the offshore islands, and that the result would be an increasing isolation of the US. Under these circumstances they might believe that US progress toward its objectives elsewhere, including West German rearmament, would be impeded, and that Soviet aims would thereby be served.

8. However, the Kremlin would almost certainly be concerned that military conflict between the US and Communist China could not be kept limited and localized. It would almost certainly estimate that unlimited war between the US and Communist China not only would endanger the existence of the principal ally of the USSR, but also would involve substantial risk of spreading into general war. Hence, it would probably attempt to exert a restraining influence if it judged that appreciable danger of unlimited war between the US and Communist China were developing. If such war did occur, we believe that the USSR would support its ally in carrying on the war, but would not assist with its own forces to such an extent as, in its judgment, would cause the US to attack targets in Soviet terri-

³This subject will be treated more fully in NIE 11-55, "Probable Soviet Response to the Ratification of the Paris Agreements," scheduled for completion about 1 March 1955.

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tory. We believe that the USSR would openly intervene in the war if the Soviet leaders considered such intervention necessary to save

the Chinese Communist regime, but the Soviet leaders would still try to confine the area of hostilities to the Far East.⁴

⁴The Director of Naval Intelligence and the Deputy Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff, believe that the following should be substituted for the last sentence:

"Should the conflict progress so far that destruction of the Chinese Communist regime appeared imminent, we believe that the Soviet leaders would recognize that open intervention on their part against US forces sufficient to save the Chinese regime would involve

grave risk of general war with the US. Their decision would probably be based on existing military, political, and economic strengths, with particular emphasis on the current disparities in nuclear stockpiles and delivery capabilities. We believe that the Soviet leaders would probably conclude that if they intervened, the conflict could not be confined to the Far East, and that Soviet strengths were insufficient to risk their own regime in this manner."

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